

OMAHA-- The Army Corps of Engineers has requested re-initiation of formal consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on the current Master Water Control Manual for the Missouri River and the Annual Operating Plan for 2003.

Formal consultation is a process under the Endangered Species Act providing the opportunity for agencies to exchange information on a proposed action and its effect on listed species.

"A substantial amount of new information and the results of additional analyses have become available since the issuance of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's 2000 Biological Opinion," said Brig. Gen. David Fastabend, Northwestern Division Engineer.

"The Corps is determined to find those elements of a comprehensive plan that will address the multiple Congressionally authorized purposes of the Missouri River projects, be consistent with the conservation needs of the listed species, the contemporary needs of the basin, and meet our trust and treaty obligations to federally recognized tribes. Formal consultation will advance this process."

The Corps plans to work cooperatively with the Fish and Wildlife Service in formal consultation to investigate additional opportunities to protect listed species consistent with the Corps' responsibilities to operate the reservoir system for all congressionally authorized purposes -- flood control hydropower, irrigation, recreation, navigation, water supply, water quality and fish and wildlife. The next step is to develop biological assessments reflecting our most recent information. "We intend to forward that information to the Fish and Wildlife Service in early January," he added.